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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S., INDIA-PAKISTAN, SYRIA-IRAN, CUBA, EU,
FALKLANDS, TURKEY, EU-GREECE, UKRAINE;BERLIN

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- [¶1.](#) Lead Stories Summary

Print media led with a number of different issues. While Frankfurter Allgemeine and Tagesspiegel centered on the Bundestag debate over the German social security system, Sueddeutsche Zeitung led with the debate on health reform under the headline: "Obama Fighting for his most Important Project." Die Welt and Berliner Morgenpost dealt with Swiss plans for Germans who have invested money in Switzerland to pay a withholding tax. Editorials focused on the troubles between the CDU/CSU and the FDP and on the collective bargaining agreement for the public sector, which was also the main issue in ZDF-TV's early evening newscast heute and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau.

- [¶2.](#) (U.S.) Healthcare Reform

Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/26) carried a front-page report under the headline: "Obama is Fighting for his most Important Project" and reported that President Obama is trying to get support for his controversial healthcare reform project. He called upon the parties to agree on a healthcare reform and asserted in a six-hour debate with leading Republicans and Democrats that was broadcast live on TV that 'there are common views.' The healthcare reform project is Obama's most important domestic project and a failure would be a serious blow for him. But even before the meeting leading Republicans described an agreement as "almost impossible.... Right

from the start, the President was obviously not so much interested in breaking up the Republican 'obstructionist front,' but the White House considered the discussion round, which the Republicans rightfully described as 'political theater' and 'photo-op,' as an opportunity to warm up the very skeptical American people for the reform."

Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/26) carried an editorial under the headline: "The Washington System" and judged: "Evan Bayh has now turned into a prosecutor against Washington, as a crown witness against the current system. But worse than his frustration is the anger with which the American people stare at the system in Washington. Only eight of 100 voters said their representative in Congress deserves his/her re-election. The United States, shaken by the worst recession in three generations, is witnessing a political depression right now. Barack Obama, too, is despairing of the system. His reform plans have gone to the dogs in the catacombs of Congress. He is seeking ways out and is trying with a 'healthcare summit' to warm up both Democrats and Republicans for some version of 'Obama-care.' But this palaver in the White House must be considered mere political theater.... It was the prime purpose of this event to present those Republican 'nay-sayers,' who usually paralyze the complex wheels of legislation in the background in Congress. Obama wants to present the Republicans as fighters behind barricades, and politicians who blockade initiatives without having any concepts on their own. And he is right. They are exactly that.... Yes, the President made mistakes...and sometimes Obama looks like the most prominent hostage of the system. But this is the only thing he can be accused of. It was not he who created this situation. The crisis goes deeper. America's Constitution created a governing system in

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which many wheels must interlock before it spits out a law. This balance of power succeeded as long as the United States was governed from the center. But today, there is a mentality to think only in Republican or Democratic terms and the obligation to vote in line with party policies - as if Congress were the House of Commons. Populists in both parties have gained the upper hand; cable TV stations and talk radio only reward rabble rousers, and every compromise is linked to the shady touch of treason. The fringes win, while the center loses."

13. (India-Pakistan) Resumption of Talks

Left-wing daily die tageszeitung (2/26) editorialized: "The Indian government is outraged - not just about Pakistan as usual, but also about the West. Leading politicians are not yet openly saying it, but you can read it everywhere. New Delhi feels treated like only the second most important NATO partner in the region - after Pakistan. Above all, it feels like a bystander in the conflict over Afghanistan. This is the case since the London conference on Afghanistan at the latest, where NATO coordinated with Afghanistan and Pakistan, not with New Delhi, its strategy of including the 'good' Taliban in the fight against the 'bad' Taliban. New Delhi vehemently opposed such a differentiation of the Taliban. When discussing Afghanistan, Indians always think of Kashmir, over which they have fought three wars against Pakistan. For them, Kashmir is the next conflict after Afghanistan. They are therefore despising compromises with the Taliban: a Taliban friendly regime in Kabul would always feel tempted to fight with Pakistan for the liberation of the Muslim brothers in Kashmir. If NATO troops were to leave the region soon, Indians would then stand alone in the fight against war-experienced Pakistanis and Afghans.... Pakistan is boasting about the western support in the fight against terrorism. Indeed, it gets the most modern counterterrorism technology from the U.S. New Delhi suspects that it must fear a Pakistan that is aligned with the West more than ever before."

14. (Syria-Iran) Ahmadinejad-Assad Meeting

Frankfurter Allgemeine 2/26) headlined: "Assad and Ahmadinejad swear oath of alliance," and noted: "Syrian President Assad and Iranian President Ahmadinejad demonstratively assured themselves to boost relations between their countries.... Both leaders signed an agreement that abolishes the visa requirement for citizens of both countries. Assad and Ahmadinejad criticized the United States for

trying to divide the alliance. On Wednesday, Secretary Clinton called on Syria to distance itself from Iran. Assad commented on Mrs. Clinton's statement: 'We must have misunderstood her because of the bad translation and our limited intellect.'... In addition, the Syrian president defended the Iranian nuclear program. Today, Iran is stopped from using this technology, tomorrow it will hit the Arabs, he said."

Die Welt (2/26) headlined: "Rendezvous of dictators - Iran and Syria pretend to be friends." The paper stated in its intro: "This was a demonstration towards Washington: only a few days after Secretary Clinton tried to lure Syria out of the alliance with Iran, Syrian president Assad met with the controversial Iranian President Ahmadinejad. Together they indulged in gestures of friendship."

15. (Cuba) Death of a Dissident

Under the headline "Cuba shuns fundamental reforms," Berliner Zeitung (2/26) commented: "However great the hopes for change were when Castro II came to power, they are now as quickly dashed. At least, a few cosmetic changes had been made concerning human rights. The death penalty of dozens of prisoners was turned into prison sentences. Political prisoners were continuously released, so that their total number fell to around 200. However, the regime

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continued to use its old methods against its critics. Yoani Sanchez, who expresses her criticism about the living conditions on an internet blog, is monitored, persecuted and sometimes intimidated. Her Kafkaesque stories on everyday's life are the thorn in the side of the government because they reveal the shortcomings of the Cuban system without expressing a clear political conviction. The death of Zapatas and the following arrests clearly show how nervous the government is and that, when it comes to human rights, the new Castro only represents the old Cuba."

16. (EU) Debate Over Leading Personnel

Frankfurter Allgemeine (2/26) editorialized: "Van Rompuy is certainly no megastar, who could bring New York City's traffic to a standstill and let the powerful men in Washington and Beijing get the jitters. This would have been the qualities of Tony Blair. However, van Rompuy does not deserve the insults he had to hear from an English chuff in the European parliament. He is doing a fairly good job in a very calm way.... Baroness Ashton shares with van Rompuy the inability of winning a charisma contest.... However, unlike the new president, she has not been able to counter the first impression that she is the wrong woman for the job. The displeasure about what she does, and what she does not do, is justified."

Sddeutsche (2/25) headlined: "Lack of power consciousness - Europe's new foreign minister Catherine Ashton raises a few eyebrows because she is giving up power without any need right at the beginning of her tenure." The paper highlighted: "The informal meeting of EU defense minister on the Spanish island of Mallorca might not be the most important of its kind. However, the fact that the high representative Ashton cancelled her participation at short notice meet raised eyebrows among diplomats."

17. (Falkland Islands) Tensions over Drilling

Over the past few days, several papers reported on the new tensions between the UK and the Falklands. But only today's Die Welt (2/26) mentioned the U.S. position and reported under the headline "Oil is Fuelling the Falkland Conflict," and wondered: "Will history repeat itself? No one is talking about a new armed conflict, but the contradictions have reached a new sharpness, and the UK government is, as a provisional measure, increasing its military presence in the South Atlantic. This time it is economic interests that have rekindled the conflict. Unlike in the conflict from 1982, the government in London cannot rely on U.S. support. While ex-President Ronald Reagan sided with the British side and offered ex-PM Margaret Thatcher precious logistical support in reconquering the Falkland Islands, the White House is insisting today on a position of neutrality and wants to push both sides to enter into bilateral

talks."

18. (Turkey) Military Officials Arrested

In a front-page editorial, Frankfurter Allgemeine (2/26) stated: "The images of the crisis meeting between the president, the prime minister and the chief of the general staff show how much power relations have changed in Turkey.... The highest representative of the military forces was clearly subordinate to the elected representatives of the people. This message is new in Turkey - and it is almost revolutionary because the military forces have seen themselves for a long time as the authority that defends the state as they see it and the political legacy of its founder Kemal Ataturk against incapable, corrupt and ideologically unreliable politicians; if necessary also with force. There were three military coups between 1963 and 1980. However, those days seem to be gone.... The restriction of the army is not yet at all a victory of democracy... Turkey is a deeply divided country - and still some time away from a

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stable democracy."

19. (EU-Greece) Bail-out Package

Frankfurter Allgemeine (2/26) argued in a lengthy editorial: "The comfortable life for the Greeks has come to an end. But many Greeks do not want to accept this, are outraged at German media, and assume that the Germans are behind the tough EU course, while they hardly mention their own lapses.... In the eyes of the majority of Germans they made a great sacrifice by abolishing the D-mark, which created an identity for all Germans. With the collective experience of two currency reforms, the Germans consider the attempted violation of the Maastricht Treaty - it bans one country from paying the debts of another - a danger for the stability of the euro, while the soft currency countries insinuate that the Germans only want to safeguard their economic superiority in the EU with the euro. But the constant violation of the Stability Pact is responsible for the escalation of the debt crisis. Fortunately, the German government insists on adhering to common rules.... By consolidating its budget, Greece will regain credibility. Those who want to replace the auction of Greek bonds by transfer payments from Brussels and Frankfurt will invite others to speculate against the euro, overestimate Germany's financial power, and risk a failure of the Monetary Union. It is true that the German government is fighting on its own in the euro group, but it is in a strong position. Without German participation in the bail-out package for Greece, each package would fail in the capital markets. If Chancellor Merkel remains steadfast and allows only the IMF to help Greece, can she save the euro."

Under the headline: "A Euro Oversight Group Must Be Set Up," Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/26) opined: "In this exciting debate over the Greek mismanagement, one decisive term is missing: consequences.

It is true that the Greeks have been called upon to change their relaxed style of living. But what will happen if nothing happens? What are the consequences Greece has to fear? Greece needs profound reforms. But it is also visible that the European financial and monetary bodies also require profound reforms. The European statistical office Eurostat has no real authority, and this is incomprehensible. But by far more dramatic are the shortcomings of the EU finance ministers who introduced the euro. And the third body that is responsible is the European Commission. Even if the currency commissioner spoke out clearly on the issue, he would need the approval of the Commission's president, who would say 'no' because of pressure from the national governments. The Greek fiasco clearly demonstrated that member states cannot be disciplined by other member states. If the Monetary Union is to survive, then it must be urgently controlled by an oversight agency that is independent of all EU bodies and member states."

110. (Ukraine) Yanukovich Inaugurated

Under the headline: "First Brussels, Then Moscow," Die Welt (2/26) editorialized: "Victor Yanukovich was inaugurated into his office on Thursday. He delivered a brief address in which he spoke of a dramatic economic situation.... He also spoke of Ukraine as an

"European non-aligned state' and as a 'bridge between East and West.' His first trip will bring him to Brussels, and only his second one goes to Moscow. We are anxious to see to what extent, as he indicated, he wants to include the EU in the restructuring efforts of his gas pipelines. And there is still Julia Timochenko, who wanted to lead her country into the EU. But we can hardly expect a smooth co-habitation between the two but rather a mutual blockade. This would be the last thing the country needs right now.

A bit more stability, efficiency, predictability, this was also something the president addressed in his speech. And this would really be progress."

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